



Introductory

In October 2022, a groundbreaking collaboration between the Biblioteca Nacional de Aruba (BNA), the Archivo Nacional Aruba (ANA), and Union di Organisacionnan Cultural Arubano (UNOCA) culminated in the establishment of the "Coleccion Aruba" platform, providing unrestricted digital access to over 100,000 archival items from Aruba and beyond.

This transformative journey started in March 2019 by the BNA, coincidentally launching its digital collection just before the onset of the global pandemic. Leveraging the Internet Archive platform, this initiative aimed to streamline the organization of their extensive collection and enhance accessibility to both physical and born-digital materials. Notably, this move marked a significant stride towards reducing dependency on external entities for daily digital asset management. The digital project's timing was particularly fortunate, especially during the pandemic. Despite widespread closures, the BNA's online collection provided vital information to Aruban residents, scholars, and students worldwide.

Building on this momentum, in March 2022, the Archivo Nacional Aruba (ANA) enhanced its digital accessibility by unveiling segments of its collections alongside BNA's digital collection. Utilizing the Internet Archive's infrastructure, ANA implemented Transkribus, an AI-powered handwritten text recognition application, to facilitate the legibility of old colonial documents and revolutionize the comprehension of Aruba's history.

After the official launch on September 28th, the platform now includes 11 full partners and 9 contributing institutions from Aruba, the Netherlands, and Bonaire (find us on <https://coleccion.aw/> and <https://www.facebook.com/coleccionaruba>)



"The journey from digital inception to collaborative fruition underscores the potential of unified efforts in preserving and disseminating cultural heritage. As we envision the future of Coleccion Aruba, we recognize its power to foster greater inclusivity, accessibility, and historical insight across the Kingdom and beyond."— Coleccion Aruba.

Purpose of the Dutch Caribbean Digital Heritage Week:

The aim of this Dutch Caribbean Digital Heritage (DCDH) Week is to convene stakeholders from the cultural heritage sector of the Dutch Caribbean and the Netherlands to discuss collaborative initiatives. The focus is on utilizing the intersectoral collaboration model established in Aruba, known as "Coleccion Aruba," to foster cooperation and coordination among heritage sectors across the (Dutch) Caribbean. This collaborative approach aims to enhance the preservation and accessibility of collections in small island states, encompassing both pre- and post-slavery periods. The goal is to unite efforts towards comprehensive heritage preservation and access, recognizing our shared history and cultural heritage as a Kingdom.

We aim also to culminate this initiative with a declaration of collaboration and mutual assistance, as well as the development of a strategic plan for the future. This plan aims not only to facilitate the sharing of information on a larger platform but also to outline measures for the preservation of both digital and physical cultural heritage assets, which is the ultimate goal we have in mind.

Provisional Program “Dutch Caribbean Digital Heritage Week”

April 8: Official Opening “Symposium” (presentation of the Coleccion Aruba - speeches of cultural heritage institutions collaborating with the Coleccion and with this Symposium).

April 9: Presentations regarding dissemination of information and collaborative actions (networking day and in-depth discussions).

April 10 & 11: 2-day work session with in-depth discussions about networking and activities related to the digital heritage, and inventorying the situation in the Dutch Caribbean hosted by Netwerk Digitaal Erfgoed (NDE).

April 12: Guided tours at the Archivo Nacional Aruba and the Biblioteca Nacional Aruba and a closing session with a preliminary report and the signing of a declaration of Oranjestad, to work together for a broader dissemination and preservation of our shared cultural and historical heritage.

**Welcome Reception planned for April 9 and
Closing Cultural Activity on April 12.**

Intended Audience:

This symposium is aimed at all (semi)-public and private institutions and organizations within the cultural heritage sector of the Dutch Caribbean and the Netherlands, which serve as custodians of our "shared" heritage, encompassing both pre-colonial and colonial eras. Additionally, it is targeted towards policymakers from both the territories.

To register: symposium@coleccion.aw

Presenters for this Symposium on April 8:

Besides the partners of the platform Coleccion Aruba, the following institutions/organizations will be collaborating with this Symposium:

Internet Archive (US), Netwerk Digitaal Erfgoed, Beeld en Geluid, Kenniscentrum DEN voor Digitale Transformatie, and others to be announced.

2-day work session (NDE-conference) on April 10 & 11:

This will be led by the “Netwerk Digitaal Erfgoed” (NDE). Besides in-depth discussions about networking, the focus will be on addressing the needs of the Caribbean heritage sector, including potential collaborations between entities and territories regarding knowledge sharing, manpower, equipment, etc. The aim of the session is to take the first step in cataloging the wishes and needs of the participants, and inventorying the situation in the Dutch Caribbean (information about this session will be sent out separately by the NDE to participants).

Motivation for this DCDH-week:

During the last Catshuis session in October in Sint Maarten, which addressed the slavery past and its impact on our societies, as well as healing, the cultural-historical heritage sector of the Dutch Caribbean generally agreed and emphasized the need for increased cooperation and mutual support in the implementation of management, retention, accessibility, and provision of information among themselves.

The Aruban cultural heritage platform, “Coleccion Aruba,” strongly believes that the collaborative approach adopted by the Aruban partners since 2022 can serve as a model due to its best practices. This model can effectively address the reality faced by Caribbean small island states.

We must acknowledge the fact that, as small island states, we face common problems and limitations such as lack of equipment, personnel, and funding in the new digital era. However, with the necessary creativity and cooperation, we can work towards practical solutions to ensure we remain competitive and make information more accessible in this evolving technological world.

Furthermore, it is crucial to recognize the various approaches taken by Dutch institutions and organizations to realize projects related to the (Dutch) Caribbean. Therefore, it is imperative to acknowledge that it is time for a shift in perceptions on both sides of the ocean. If the apologies made by the Dutch Government are sincere, there must no longer be an approach of “institutional colonialism” from the Netherlands in aiding the Dutch Caribbean. Simultaneously, it is essential to understand that collaboration and assistance between the Caribbean and the Kingdom must occur on the basis of equality, in an open and transparent manner. The Aruba Platform advocates for collaboration on a “win-win” basis and emphasizes the importance of “low cost and high impact” strategies due to the Caribbean reality of our small size. Our local heritage network “Coleccion Aruba” welcomes the collaboration with NDE, in this Dutch Caribbean Heritage Week.

“Thanks to its open and collaborative nature, as well as its focus on “low cost, high impact” strategies, the “Coleccion Aruba” has the potential to serve as a model for cultural heritage initiatives in Small Island Developing States. This highlights the significance of partnerships and community engagement in promoting sustainable development and cultural preservation.”— Coleccion Aruba.